DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 441 456 IR 057 727

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TITLE Voice of India's Disabled: Demanding Equality in Library Services.
PUB DATE 1999-08-00
NOTE 7p.; In: IFLA Council and General Conference. Conference Programme and Proceedings (65th, Bangkok, Thailand, August 20-28, 1999); see IR 057 674.
AVAILABLE FROM For full text: http://www.ifla.org/IV/ifla65/papers/044-132e.htm.
PUB TYPE Opinion Papers (120) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Access to Information; *Disabilities; Foreign Countries; Legislation; *Library Services; National Surveys; Training; *User Needs (Information); Users (Information)
IDENTIFIERS *India

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses library services to the disabled in India. The introduction summarizes results of a country-wide survey of persons with disabilities and recent government guidelines relating to the rights of the disabled. The first section addresses needs of the disabled. The second section describes types of disability, including physical disabilities (spinal chord injury, amputated limbs, blindness/visual impairment, and hearing impairment) and mental disabilities (learning disability, mental illnesses, and mental retardation). The third section outlines the following aspects of creating a model library program for the disabled: (1) training of library staff, including components of an effective training plan (objective, structure, materials, contents, and review); (2) developing user assistance schemes, including a list of services that might be offered; and (3) offering special services, including services for the blind, speech and hearing impaired, physically challenged, and persons suffering from mental disability. (Contains 18 references.) (MES)

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ED 441 456

IFLANET
International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions
Search Contacts
Annual Conference

65th IFLA Council and General Conference

Bangkok, Thailand,
August 20 - August 28, 1999

Conference Proceedings

Code Number: 044-132-E
Division Number: III
Professional Group: Libraries Serving Disadvantaged Persons
Joint Meeting with: -
Meeting Number: 132
Simultaneous Interpretation: *No*

Voice of India's Disabled: Demanding Equality in Library Services

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Abstract

Individuals with disabilities have varying degrees of need. Their needs are just like those of the people who are not disabled. This paper describes the nature of various types of disability that may affect the normal lives of persons, such as physical and mental disabilities. Since libraries are a common platform , one of the ways and means of bridging the gap of ability and disability is by ensuring an effective library service for the disadvantaged. There is therefore an urgent need for training 'Library Managers' and 'Library workers' to understand the nature of disability and help such users according to the severity of their disability. This paper also thus enumerates a training plan which broadly encompasses the needs of the disabled that can help librarians to become agents of social change.

Paper

INTRODUCTION:

A comprehensive country wide survey of persons with disability revealed that approx: over 90 million people are suffering from one or the other kind of disability. It can be said that about 12 million are blind, 28.5 are partially visually impaired, 12 million people have speech and hearing defects, 6 million are orthopaedically handicapped, 24 million are mentally retarded, 7.5 million are mentally ill and 1.1 are cured of leprosy. The National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO- 1991) revealed that 1.9% of the country's total population were affected with physical and sensory disabilities and surveys conducted by various research organisations

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indicate that about 3% are mentally disabled. Disabled people in India have been subjected to direct and indirect discrimination for centuries. There is little doubt that it is discrimination not disability that disables people. They deserve a comprehensive legislation to tackle the blatant discrimination against them. With human rights organisations voicing their concerns both nationally and internationally and also acting as their guardians, an increasing number of countries are vigorously preparing policies favourable to the disabled people. In India the recent guidelines framed by the Govt called "THE PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES (Equal opportunities, protection of rights and full participation) ACT 1995 ensures that the appropriate Govts and local authorities implement the Act which says:

a. ensure that every child with a disability has access to free education in an appropriate environment till he attains the age of 18 years
b. endeavour to promote the integration of students with disabilities in the normal school.
c. promote setting up special schools in govt and private sector for those in need of special education in such a manner that children with disabilities living in any part of the country have access to such schools.
d. endeavour to equip the special schools for children with disabilities with vocational training facilities.

Although the new Act will help to develop positive action programmes, there are no positive guidelines for helping the disabled to have access to an effective library and information services programme. If the law offers them equal opportunities they must also ensure that people serving the disabled such as the Govts and NGO's find new ways of serving the disabled. Here, Libraries and Library workers can play their part to hasten the process of full and total integration of the disabled in the society in a big way.

NEEDS OF THE DISABLED:

Individuals with disability have varying degrees of need. Their needs are just like those who are not disabled. They often strive hard for a high quality of life as other normal individuals. Unfortunately many a times people fail to understand that disability in simple terms is nothing but a natural part of the human experience. Often they are shrouded by misconceptions such as, that the disabled are forced to lead a poor quality of life. But the fact is, a person with disability with all limitations can carry out normal activities of living if they have an easy access to community based long term services such as an attendant care, accesses to buildings, public transportation, side walks etc . Even the severely disabled, when provided with quality health care services and the necessary equipments are able to carry on the tasks similar to those done by the non-disabled. One cannot but feel disturbed that inspite of having the capacity they have to continue remaining disabled because of lack of a strong community based support system. A disabled who is in the prime of his youth, demands an equal opportunity and must therefore be offered a range of assistance such as examination support, specialised equipments, library assistance, note taking in class, reader sign interpreters and parking provisions etc. Only when they have a strong support such as the ones mentioned above they can hope to lead normal lives.

TYPES OF DISABILITY:

In order to assist the disabled in leading an active and purposeful life it is important to identify and understand the various types of disability that can be assisted. They can broadly be classified as Physical and Mental disabilities.

I. Physical Disabilities:

a. Spinal Chord Injury:
It is an injury or damage done to the spinal chord due to an accident or a fall, which may result in partial or complete paralysis. The most common condition

that occurs when there is a spinal injury is Paraplegia- meaning, paralysis of legs affecting both movements and sensation. Another condition is Quadriplegia- a degree of paralysis in all four extremities such as arms and legs.

b. Amputated Limbs:
Amputees are those persons who have one or more missing limbs as a result of accidents caused by vehicles, machinery or any other deformity caused during birth. Such persons can be partially mobile.

c. Blindness/ Visual impairment:
There are several kinds of visual impairment of which the most common is blindness which can occur due to various reasons such as malnutrition during childhood, illness, or due to accidents. Persons with visual disability have a wide range of abilities as well as limitations. They may be able to read large print and may even move about without any mobility equipments in most situations or sometimes they may be able to perceive light and darkness and perhaps even colours.

d. Hearing Impairment:
Individuals may be affected by hearing impairment at all ages, the extent of which could be mild or severe depending upon the age of onset, degree and type of loss. Each individuals adjustment to hearing loss is different from one another. Some can be assisted with hearing aids while others are not affected by it. Persons who are deaf due to hearing loss after the age of 20, tend to have fair understanding, near normal speech and hearing but may require instructions to gain useful speech reading.

II. Mental Disabilities

a. Learning disability:
It is a disorder which affects the basic psychological processes of understanding or using written or spoken language. It can damage the ability to speak, read, write, listen, spell or do mathematical calculations. Conditions such as brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia are examples of learning disabilities.

b. Mental Illnesses:
These encompass Schizophrenia, anxiety disorders and depressive disorders. Schizophrenia is a highly complex disorder which is caused due to a series of chemical changes in the brain. It usually occurs between the age groups of 15-25 years and is characterised by fragmented thoughts followed by an inability to process information. The condition affects the individuals family, professional and social life making him incapable of functioning normally. Surprizingly their intelligence is not affected and many of them are capable of leading partially normal life if they follow their regular pattern of medication and rehabilitation programmes such as those offered by half-way-homes.

c. Mental Retardation:
It is distinguished from mental illness because of its presence before birth. A condition characterised by abnormal brain development in the womb not corresponding with normal physical growth. Their learning ability, reasoning power and judgement all develop at a slower pace. Accidents, poisoning, or illness after birth can be a cause for mental retardation. Many of the mentally retarded people are able to participate in activities with non-disabled people given an appropriate adaptation and support. Others may require a long term structured programme. With adequate training and education such persons can be more self reliant citizens. They can be found holding non-skilled or semi skilled jobs and

can be made to effectively integrated into the social structure.

CREATING A MODEL LIBRARY PROGRAMME FOR THE DISABLED:

In order to create an efficient and effective library programme for the disabled, Libraries need managers who are upto date and are aware of the latest developments that are likely to have profound effect on their services. It is their collective responsibility to promote quality services by gaining a good insight into the problems faced by the disabled. Library staff must recognise that some disabled persons have no control over their behaviour and must be competent enough to handle difficult situations. They must be prepared to give individual attention so as to understand their strongest communication mode . Therefore the following aspects are essential to develop a model library programme for them by way of: a) Training of Library staff, b)Developing User Assistance Schemes, c) Offering Special Services

a) TRAINING OF LIBRARY STAFF

Professional library services depends largely on the continuous upgrading of staff through training on a regular basis. It could be fortnightly, monthly, or seasonal training. Special training requirements can be determined by the Library management and training Officers depending upon the skills and training needs of the individuals. Once the need has been assessed the method of training can be planned. Here is a simple and effective training plan that can be implemented:

Objective:
To familiarize with important aspects of disability and disabled users in a Library environment.

Structure:
A five day course of lectures, discussions and practical work. The practical training could be held in small groups giving each group an opportunity to work with all types of disabled users.

Materials:
A resource package of the training manual.

Contents:

- Concepts on disability: (visits to hospitals, centres for the blind and other kinds of handicapped persons).
- Developing communication and counselling skills.
- Professional library services, single line of command, concentration of effort, time bound work, field orientation and linkage with research.
- Case studies.

Review:
In training and work review sessions staff of all levels can report and discuss their successes from which lessons may be drawn.

b) DEVELOPING USER ASSISTANCE SCHEMES:

Once the Library worker gets trained they will feel that it is their collective responsibility to provide quality services by gaining a good insight into the problems faced by the disabled and thereby he/ she will be competent enough to create an efficient and effective user assistance scheme such as:

- Providing the disabled users with reading lists and catalogues, high demand materials

and lecture tapes that are held in open reservation.
- Delivering books and other documents from library shelves.
- Photocopying of Library materials and enlarging for the partially blind.
- Paging books from stacks and shelf areas.
- Extending loan periods or modifying other lending rules on an individual basis.
- Accepting telephone requests and providing reference service.
- Conducting orientation tours and information skills sessions.
- Providing audio visual equipments.
- Assisting in the use of computer aided learning equipments such as CD-ROMS, optical disks etc.
- Providing access to library facilities by ensuring that directional signs are labelled at appropriate locations with large, simple and clear messages.

c) OFFERING SPECIAL SERVICES:

Different types of disability require different types of specialised services. The same theory holds good for library services as well and hence the trained library personnel will taken into consideration the following points to fulfil the objectives:

- Library services for the blind must enable them to have access to equipments such as Braille printers, Braille embosser and tape duplicators, Kuzweil reader (a text- to speed reading machine with synthesised speech output) , closed circuit TVs for magnifying regular text, PCs with CD ROMS, Powermacs with CD ROMS, large print tape writers, special track tape recorders, computers that are having adaptable equipments such as voice eyes.
- Services for speech and hearing impaired users must include TTD communications (a device also known as TTY-text type telephone) for those needing library questions answered on telephone. Librarians must also familiarise themselves with American sign language which is considered to be the common language of the deaf community.
- For the physically challenged the library facility must be barrier free to wheel chairs and other mobility devices and ensuring that all devices including door handles are designed for easy manipulation.
- Persons suffering from mental disability can be served by helping to locate and retrieve materials. Because reading is a common problem for them they may enquire assistance in identifying the materials of both the print and electronic types of documents. They also need help in turning catalogue cards or keying in commands on the computer. People suffering from mental illness such as Schizophrenia must be motivated to read books on self-development and may require constant counselling to use library resources to overcome their depression. This is termed as "Bibliotherapy", that is, using books for therapy.

CONCLUSION:

Libraries and library workers can thus play a significant role in bringing hope to the otherwise dismal situations of the disabled world. Adequate financial support must be sought in order to sustain the above mentioned library services and subsequently expand them to suit the latest technological advancement. There is a need to explore new sources of funding taking into account the reality that the networking of Indian libraries can save funds by way of avoiding duplication of services and also help in providing an efficient inter library loan service thus reducing the time of the reader considerably. Like normal individuals the disabled also need information and other services to help them raise above their disability. Library and information centres in educational institutions must be encouraged to raise funds by marketing their services. In the process they must try to integrate not only persons with disability with normal users but also integrate the electronic media with their collections and develop local networks. Libraries and Librarians will thus bridge the gap of disability and ability by creating a networked society where in, every individual will be connected without any discrimination.

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Latest Revision: *June 7, 1999*

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